

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-352. (Canceled)

353. (Previously presented) A method for producing meat having a proportional fat content, comprising:

providing at least a first and second stream of meat having at least fat and water;

treating at least the first and second streams with a bacteria-reducing agent;

measuring at least the fat content of the first and second streams;

transferring a controlled amount of the first and second streams to a vessel having a gas, wherein the majority of the gas comprises carbon dioxide;

blending the first and second streams in the vessel to provide a blended stream of proportional fat content;

transferring the blended stream into a barrier package substantially impermeable to oxygen;

removing oxygen from the package;

sealing the package to contain the meat and gas with a free oxygen level lower than the oxygen level of air; and

testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

354. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the package contains information related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

355. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the quantity of free oxygen, including oxygen that may be derived from the reduction of oxymyoglobin in meat in the sealed package, does not exceed 1,500 ppm.

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356. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the bacteria-reducing agent includes a measured amount of water, wherein the measured water replaces water evaporated from the meat.

357. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the package is a chub package.

358. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the package is a case-ready modified-atmosphere package.

359. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

360. (Previously presented) A method for processing meat primals, comprising:

obtaining meat primals having at least fat and water;

reducing the bacteria on the meat primals;

transferring the meat primals to containers;

removing oxygen from the containers;

sealing the containers;

storing the containers;

removing the primals from the containers and cutting the primals to provide primal portions;

placing the primal portions into barrier packages substantially impermeable to oxygen;

introducing a gas into the packages, wherein the majority of said gas comprises gas other than air;

sealing the packages; and

testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

361. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the packages contain information related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

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362. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the gas has oxygen in proportions higher than the proportion of oxygen in air.

363. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the gas has oxygen in proportions lower than the proportion of oxygen in air.

364. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

365. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein testing is done in the package.

366. (Previously presented) A method for producing ground meat, comprising:

grinding meat to provide ground meat;

exposing the meat to a gas before or during grinding, wherein said gas inhibits bacterial growth, and wherein the majority of said gas comprises carbon dioxide;

transferring the ground meat to a web of barrier material substantially impermeable to oxygen;

sealing the web to enclose the ground meat in an atmosphere having an oxygen level lower than the oxygen level of air;

testing the ground meat for the presence of bacteria; and

applying indicia to the web, wherein the indicia include information related to the ground meat.

367. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the meat is ground in a gas having an oxygen content lower than the oxygen content of air, and the quantity of oxygen in the sealed web is not more than 500 ppm.

368. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

369. (Previously presented) A method for producing a meat product, comprising:

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harvesting meat from an animal, said meat comprised of several components, including at least fat, muscle, and water, wherein the amount of at least one component is determined; treating the meat with an agent including water that inhibits the growth of bacteria; grouping the meat into classifications; combining quantities of meat from one or more classifications to provide a meat product with a combined quantity of at least one component; determining the proportion of water in the meat product; enclosing the meat product within a packaging material to provide a packaged meat product; testing the meat for the presence of bacteria; and applying information to the package, including information relating to the packaged meat product.

370. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the agent is acidic.

371. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the agent comprises carbonic acid.

372. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the package provides recesses to contain liquids that may escape from the meat.

373. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

374-421. (Canceled)

422. (Previously presented) A method for packaging meat, comprising:

transferring pieces of meat to individual packages;

transferring the individual packages to a separate barrier container substantially impermeable to oxygen;

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introducing a blend of gases to the barrier container, wherein said gases include carbon monoxide; and

sealing the barrier container to prevent the escape of gases therefrom.

423. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 422, further comprising reducing the bacteria on the meat.

424. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 423, further comprising testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

425. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 422, further comprising removing oxygen from the barrier containers.

426. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 425, further comprising storing the barrier containers.

427. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 367, wherein the gas contains carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

428. (Previously presented) A method for processing and packaging meat, comprising:
harvesting meat comprised of several components, including at least fat, muscle, and water, wherein the amount of at least one component is determined;
grouping the meat into classifications;
combining quantities of meat from one or more classifications to provide a meat product with a combined quantity of at least one component;
determining the proportion of water in the meat product;
enclosing the meat product with a selected gas within a packaging material to provide a packaged meat product;
testing the meat for the presence of bacteria; and

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applying information to the package, including information relating to the packaged meat product.

429. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 428, wherein the selected gas contains an amount of carbon monoxide.

430. (Previously presented) A method for processing and packaging meat, comprising: combining a first quantity of meat with a second quantity of meat, wherein at least one of said quantities of meat has been treated with carbon dioxide and a predetermined amount of water that replaces water that evaporates from the meat during processing.

431. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 430, further comprising combining the first and second quantities of meat in proportions according to at least one variable in at least one of the selected quantities to provide proportioned meat.

432. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 431, further comprising transferring the proportioned meat into an enclosed conduit.

433. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 432, further comprising testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

434. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 433, further comprising transferring the proportioned meat into packaging.

435. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 434, wherein the packaging comprises a barrier package containing a selected gas.

436. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 435, wherein the selected gas includes a measured amount of carbon monoxide.

437. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 433, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

438. (Previously presented) A method for producing meat, comprising:
transferring a first stream of meat to a device capable of measuring;

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transferring a second stream of meat to a device capable of measuring fat or water; and combining the first and second streams of meat to produce a combined stream of meat that has fat or water content adjusted by adjusting the rate of transfer of the first and the second streams of meat, wherein the first and second streams of meat are in contact with a gas while transferring to said device, wherein said gas has an oxygen content greater than 5 ppm and less than 5% by volume.

439. (Previously presented) A method for producing meat, comprising:
transferring a first stream of meat to a device capable of measuring fat or water;
transferring a second stream of meat to a device capable of measuring fat or water; and combining the first and second streams of meat to produce a combined stream of meat that has fat or water content adjusted by adjusting the rate of transfer of the first and the second streams of meat, wherein combining takes place in the presence of a gas that has an oxygen content greater than 5 ppm and less than 5% by volume.

440. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the information is related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

441. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the information is related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

442. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 428, wherein the information is related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

443. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the meat.

444. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 443, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

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445. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the packages contain information related to a determined water content of the meat.

446. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 445, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

447. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the meat.

448. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 447, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

449. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 428, wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the meat.

450. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 449, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

451. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the indicia contain information related to a determined water content of the meat.

452. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 451, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

453. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 422, wherein the containers contain information related to a determined water content of the meat.

454. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 453, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

455. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 434, wherein the packaging contains information related to a determined water content of the meat.

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456. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 455, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage of the packaging.

457. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 438, further comprising packaging the combined meat in a package wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the packaged meat.

458. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 457, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

459. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 439, further comprising packaging the combined meat in a package wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the packaged meat.

460. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 459, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

461. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 425, further comprising storing the barrier containers for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

462. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, further comprising storing the package for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

463. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 361, further comprising storing the packages for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

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464. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, further comprising storing the meat for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

465. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 423, further comprising storing the container for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

466. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 428, further comprising storing the package for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

467. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 429, further comprising storing the package for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

468. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 442, further comprising storing the packaged meat for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

469. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 438, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

470. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 439, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

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471. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

472. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

473. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

474. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

475. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 428, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

476. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 429, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

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477. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

478. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

479. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

480. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the package contains gas comprising carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

481. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 422, wherein the blend of gases comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

482. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 438, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

483. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 439, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

484. (Previously presented) A method for processing and blending meat to have a substantially uniform fat content, comprising:

transferring a first stream of meat to a blending vessel, wherein said first stream of meat has a non-uniform fat content along the stream, the average fat content of the first stream being relatively high;

transferring a second stream of meat to a blending vessel, wherein said second stream of meat has a non-uniform fat content along the stream, the average fat content of the second stream being relatively low;

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blending each stream independently of one another in respective vessels while carbon dioxide gas is made to contact each stream of meat while the meat is being blended to achieve a substantially uniform fat content leaving each blending vessel;

measuring the fat content of each blended stream of meat; and

blending the first and second blended streams of meat with one another to produce a meat product having a fat content that is between the averages of the first and the second streams.

485. (Previously presented) A method for processing and blending a quantity of beef in a substantially continuous stream, measuring the stream of meat to determine the fat content and sealing meat in a container, comprising:

transferring a first stream of ground meat to a blending vessel after grinding, wherein said first stream of meat has a non-uniform fat content along the stream;

blending said first stream of ground meat in said vessel while carbon dioxide gas is made to contact the first stream of meat while the meat is being blended to achieve a substantially uniform fat content leaving said blending vessel in a second stream in an enclosed conduit;

measuring the fat content of said second stream of ground meat;

transferring said second stream of measured ground meat to at least one container containing a controlled quantity of gas; and

sealing said container to enclose a measured quantity of processed meat selected from said second stream of meat with a determined quantity of gas and storing said meat in a container.

486. (New) A method for processing and blending a first quantity of beef transferred to a first vessel in a stream of ground beef, measuring the ground beef to determine the fat content of said first quantity of ground beef transferred into said first vessel and sealing said quantity of ground beef in at least one second vessel, comprising:

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transferring a first stream of ground beef to a first blending vessel, wherein said first stream of ground beef has a non-uniform fat content along the stream and prior to blending; blending said first stream of ground beef in said first vessel while chilled carbon dioxide gas is made to contact the first stream of ground beef while the ground beef is being blended; blending said ground beef to achieve a substantially uniform fat content when leaving said first blending vessel in a second stream and measuring the fat content of said ground beef after blending; transferring said second stream of measured ground meat to at least one second vessel wherein said second vessel contains a controlled quantity of gas; sealing said second vessel to enclose a measured quantity of processed ground beef transferred from said second stream of ground beef, together with a determined quantity of gas and then storing said blended, quantity of ground beef in said sealed second container; said second vessel comprising a sealable container.

487. (New) A method for processing and blending a first quantity of beef transferred to a first vessel in a stream of ground beef, measuring the ground beef to determine the fat content of said first quantity of ground beef transferred into said first vessel and sealing said quantity of ground beef in at least one second vessel, comprising:

transferring a first stream of ground beef to a first blending vessel, wherein said first stream of ground beef has a non-uniform fat content along the stream and prior to blending; blending said first stream of ground beef in said first vessel while chilled nitrogen gas is made to contact the first stream of ground beef while the ground beef is being blended; blending said ground beef to achieve a substantially uniform fat content when leaving said first blending vessel in a second stream and measuring the fat content of said ground beef after blending; transferring said second stream of measured ground meat to at least one second vessel wherein said second vessel contains a controlled quantity of gas; sealing said second vessel to enclose a measured quantity of processed ground beef transferred from said second stream of ground beef, together

with a determined quantity of gas and then storing said blended, quantity of ground beef in said sealed second container; said second vessel comprising a sealable container.

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